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Wisconsin Governor Doyle, Illinois Governor Blagojevich, & Illinois Congressman Emanuel Launch I-SaveRx Prescription Drug Importation Program

Citizens of Wisconsin & Illinois Now Able to Purchase Prescription Drugs from Europe and Canada; Governors Invite Other States to Sign-on

CHICAGO – Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle, Illinois Governor Rod R. Blagojevich, and Congressman Rahm Emanuel (D-Chicago) launched today the new *I-SaveRx* prescription drug importation program – the first program in the nation to allow citizens to purchase lower cost, safe prescription drugs from Europe and Canada. Wisconsin is joining the new program developed by Illinois, which will provide about 18 million residents in the two states with access to lower-priced prescription drugs through a network of 45 inspected and approved pharmacies and wholesalers in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. Consumers in Wisconsin and Illinois can look up *I-SaveRx* prices and start the enrollment process by calling toll-free **1-866-ISAVE33**, or visiting www.I-SaveRx.net.

"Today, we are here to announce two things: First, beginning immediately, our prescription drug program, called *I-Save Rx*, is now open for business. Anyone who lives in Illinois can start saving money on their prescription drugs today. And second, I am delighted to announce that, thanks to the leadership of Governor Jim Doyle, the State of Wisconsin is now joining our program," Governor Blagojevich said. "So now, the nearly 13 million people who live in Illinois, and the more than 5 million people who live in Wisconsin, will have the opportunity to save hundreds – and in some cases even thousands – of dollars each year on the high cost of their medicine. It means our seniors will no longer have to spend more money than they have just to afford the medicine they need."

"There's no reason why our citizens should have to pay twice as much for safe prescription medicines as the rest of the world, but that's exactly the situation we're in because the federal government refuses to take on the drug companies," Governor Doyle said. "This initiative gives our citizens another option. The system relies only on pharmacies that have passed a rigorous inspection by Illinois – and verified by Wisconsin. It offers people both safety and savings, and we hope our citizens will take advantage of that."

"Illinois and Wisconsin are leading the nation in providing their citizens with access to safe, affordable prescription drugs and saving taxpayers millions of dollars. This is a prairie fire that is building across America," Congressman Rahm Emanuel said.

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Governor Blagojevich called on other states to join the program and expand options for people across the country who can't afford their medications. He mailed letters and program information today to all 48 other Governors.

Under the *I-SaveRx* plan launched today, participants can save an average of 25 to 50 percent on the cost of the most common medications used to treat chronic conditions. For instance, a three-month supply of the drug Lipitor in 20 mg doses, which is used to treat high cholesterol, costs an average of \$282 in the United States, but is available through *I-SaveRx* for \$180 from Ireland, \$202 from the United Kingdom, and \$210 from Canada, plus the \$15 per order shipping charge. A three-month supply of Celebrex in 100 mg doses, used to treat arthritis pain, costs \$213 in the United States, but only \$101 in Ireland, \$102 in the U.K., and \$79 in Canada, plus shipping.

A number of states, including Wisconsin, have given citizens the opportunity to save by launching websites that link users directly to mail-order pharmacies in Canada. Wisconsin's program, launched in February 2004 at www.drugsavings.wi.gov, includes links to three Canadian pharmacies that offer significant savings to citizens.

The new *I-SaveRx* program is the first to establish a network of pharmacies that includes facilities across the Atlantic. The *I-SaveRx* program has extensive safeguards built-in and includes thorough oversight of network pharmacies.

The new program connects users to the *I-SaveRx* clearinghouse, administered by CanaRx, through the website or toll-free telephone number. The clearinghouse provides users with information on the list of medications included in the program, prices in each of the three countries, and enrollment forms and guidance. Consumers can enjoy one-stop shopping rather than contacting numerous pharmacies to gather information and compare prices.

Before ordering, new enrollees must mail or have their doctor fax a completed health profile form and signed prescription to the clearinghouse. Once the clearinghouse has received the prescription and health profile form, it will conduct an initial scan for appropriateness using the same drug interaction software used in Illinois pharmacies. If the prescription passes the interaction test, it will then be turned over to a network physician in the country from which the medication will be dispensed, who will review and re-write the prescription for a local network pharmacy. The pharmacy will perform a final safety check to comply with local laws and regulations before dispensing the medication.

The *I-SaveRx* import program builds in numerous safety measures to ensure the quality and safety of drugs dispensed. The list of available drugs is limited to those that are used for long periods of time, and that cannot spoil during the shipping process. Consumers can order eligible drugs for refill only, so patients and their doctors have had time to review for unanticipated side-effects or interactions. All network pharmacies agree to comply with Illinois pharmaceutical standards, and to only dispense drugs that are intended as domestic product in Canada, Ireland, or the U.K. – meaning the pharmacies cannot dispense prescription drugs from other countries that are not part of the program to *I-SaveRx* consumers.

While all residents of Illinois and Wisconsin are eligible to enroll in *I-SaveRx*, the states are focusing their promotional efforts on reaching people who do not have prescription drug coverage – estimated at more than four million individuals in the two states combined. Of that total, older citizens have the greatest need for relief. According to the Center for Policy Alternatives, one out of every five senior citizens takes at least five prescription medications daily. Last year, the prices of the prescription drugs used most by senior citizens rose more than four times faster than the rate of inflation, according to Families USA.